Building Knowledge for Cures
Scientific excellence and compassion drive progress in Emory’s Division of Digestive Diseases

By recruiting some of the nation’s best clinicians and scientists, serving growing numbers of patients, and rising in the national rankings, Emory is poised to become the destination for digestive disease research and treatment in the Southeast. Our faculty members are experts in providing high-quality patient care and committed to pursuing innovative ideas in research. As a result, patient outcomes continue to improve, and we are working to drive health care costs down.

Private philanthropy makes all of this work possible, and opportunities to advance discovery have never been greater. Friends and grateful patients who want to help Emory develop cures and better treatments for digestive diseases can make significant contributions with gifts to the Division of Digestive Diseases research program.

Basic Science: Understanding Disease

The division’s scientists work in the lab, generating knowledge about the cells involved in digestive diseases, and they provide “proof of principle,” a key step in basic scientific research that documents how new information can be translated for use in prevention, diagnosis, and treatment. Their research explores areas such as inflammatory bowel disease, cancer, diabetes, nonalcoholic fatty liver disease, and liver scarring. These scientists study basic aspects of biology to unlock mechanisms of common digestive disorders.

Frank A. Anania, director of the Division of Digestive Diseases and the endowed R. Bruce Logue Chair and Professor of Medicine, for example, specializes in understanding why liver patients develop an excess of connective tissue that leads to scarring, cirrhosis, and cancer. His lab has been seminal in understanding how leptin, a weight-controlling hormone, can promote liver scarring while other hormones can protect the liver from disease.

Professor Mark J. Czaja is a leader in the science of autophagy, a process in which the body’s cells destroy proteins and other parts of themselves. This process can protect against disease, but it also can allow disease to thrive by interfering with medications. Dr. Czaja’s lab is studying autophagy in liver disease to understand how it can either prevent or increase cell damage.

Professor C. Chris Yun is an expert in cell signaling, the complex communication system that cells use to develop and function. Errors in cell signaling are linked to disease. Dr. Yun’s lab is exploring how this communication system operates—in both healthy cells and those with diseases—in the kidneys, colon, and other organs.

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Clinical Trials: Improving Patient Care

Faculty members in the Division of Digestive Diseases are nationally recognized for their work in clinical trials, which test the safety and effectiveness of new approaches to diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of disease. These studies are invaluable for pioneering advances in patient care.

Professor Qiang Cai focuses his clinical research on treating diseases of the pancreas, gallbladder, and bile duct. In one project, he is working to improve ERCP, a procedure that combines endoscopy with x-rays to diagnose and treat diseases such as pancreatic cancer. Dr. Cai has performed a few thousand ERCPs, and he was the first to prescribe a liquid “fatty meal” before the procedure, which makes it much easier.

Assistant Professor Tanvi Dhere studies inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), Crohn’s disease, and C. difficile, a highly infectious bacterium that can cause life-threatening inflammation of the colon. In one study, she is exploring the use of fecal microbial transplants—which have an extremely high cure rate for recurrent disease—to treat patients with C. difficile infection who have had only one or two episodes but are at risk for relapse.

Assistant Professor Heba Iskandar focuses on medication adherence, health disparities, and health literacy in IBD. She has a strong interest in quality improvement and has studied colonoscopy interval guidelines and rates of testing for celiac disease. Dr. Iskandar is starting a clinical trials program for IBD patients who have failed other therapies, and she has an ongoing clinical registry for all IBD patients who receive care in the Emory Clinic.

How You Can Help

Emory’s expertise in digestive disease research begins with the basic sciences, where innovative ideas are born, and continues through every phase of clinical trials. Our strategy is to convert laboratory findings into new approaches for diagnosing, treating, and preventing disease. This takes tremendous resources, and the division’s faculty relies on the generosity of private donors. Philanthropy helps Emory specialists apply their extraordinary expertise to life-changing discoveries. You can support their work with a gift to the Division of Digestive Diseases.

- **ENDOW A FACULTY CHAIR**, which will help Emory attract and retain leaders in digestive disease research. An essential foundation for academic medical research, endowed chairs enable these leaders to explore new treatments and promising techniques.
- **PROVIDE SEED FUNDING** so the best ideas can take root and grow. Donor support for basic science research advances innovative studies that are too early in the research process to secure federal funding.
- **BRIDGE THE GAP** between external grants. Bridge funding allows researchers to advance their work at critical points of discovery.

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